

The Honorable Dan Miller
Chairman
House Subcommittee on the Census
Testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee
March 28, 2001

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, for granting my request to testify before you today regarding the 2000 Census.

As you know, as Chairman of the Census Subcommittee since 1998, I have been deeply involved in the oversight of Census 2000 -- from planning through its execution. My public position on adjustment should not be a surprise to anyone. I have always been concerned that adjustment introduces more error into the census than it has the ability to correct, particularly at lower levels of geography critical for the redistricting process. However, even if the sampling errors were not the issue, there are larger legal and public policy implications that that should give all of us serious concern.

Acting Director Barron outlined the many reasons for the success of the 2000 census enumeration when he testified before my subcommittee several weeks ago. Among those reasons, Congressional support allowed the Bureau to hire a half million enumerators, at competitive wages, during a time of record low unemployment. This support also allowed for a first-time-ever paid advertising campaign, more than 140,000 local partnerships, and an unprecedented effort to provide multilingual assistance. In the end, it was the emphasis on counting people – not making estimates – that made this census a success, and reduced the differential undercount of minority communities.

Supporters of adjustment say this success is not enough and they will argue for the release of these inaccurate numbers in the name of fairness and justice.

I share their desire for fairness. But good intentions do not justify bad public policy. And a statistically adjusted census is bad policy on many different levels.

- Statistical adjustment is less accurate where it's critically important to be accurate – at small geographic levels. We have known for some time that statistically adjusted numbers do NOT give us a more accurate picture of the population when describing smaller aggregations of the population, such as small towns, rural areas and blocks. The Bureau's recommendation against sampling reads, "The analysis for counties with populations below 100,000 people indicated that the unadjusted census was more accurate."

- Since apportionment and redistricting go hand-in-hand, it's arguably illegal for adjusted numbers to be used for redistricting, based on the Supreme Court's 1999 ruling.
- Use of adjustment would reduce people's incentive to participate in the actual census, which would degrade data quality and reduce accuracy. Why stand up and be counted when you can sit down and be sampled?
- It is also disturbing to me that under adjustment, some people are counted as less than a whole person. Under adjustment, everyone is assigned to a category. One of these categories is "Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Women over 18 who own their home." If adjustment were to go forward, everyone in that category would be assigned a value of 0.95. In other words, every Hawaiian adult woman owning a home anywhere in the United States, who answered the census, would be counted as little more than nine-tenths of a person. Adjustment assumes that all people in a certain category act alike, or have the same likelihood of filling out their census forms. These types of assumptions are something we should be moving away from, and not embracing.
- Finally, I worry about the subjective assumptions that are inherent to the statistical adjustment process.

A professor at Harvard University put it very well in his commentary in the Wall Street Journal on February 15. He said, quote,

"Unfortunately, statistical adjustment also gives much greater discretion to the Census Bureau. The correction procedure is based on population subgroups, and choosing them is very subjective. Do we treat all young urban black males as a subgroup or do we separate them by region? How many ethnic groups do we want to treat as distinct? This leads to a general point: As you allow for more statistical sophistication, you put more discretion in the hands of the statistician." End quote.

This census and this Census Bureau have proven that we can achieve nearly one hundred percent accuracy through a strong congressional commitment, strong Bureau management, improved technology, and expanded local partnerships. By all means, there is still room for improvement. But this and future Congresses should put a priority on the methods that are legal, accurate and ethical. We should not continue the pursuit of a costly, unlawful, inaccurate, and racially biased adjustment of our constitutionally mandated decennial census.

Finally, regarding the question of releasing adjusted census data for federal funding and other purposes, because of the errors and problems with the adjustment, I agree with Bureau officials that it would be highly irresponsible to release adjusted data for any official purpose.